PUGET SOUND nearshore PROJECT

A partnership between the citizens and governments of the State of Washington and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies.

What and where is the Puget Sound Nearshore?

The Puget Sound Nearshore is defined as that area of marine and estuarine shoreline extending approximately 2,500 miles from the Canadian border, throughout Puget Sound and out the Straits of Juan de Fuca to Neah Bay. It generally extends from the top of shoreline bluffs to the depth offshore where light penetrating the Sound's water falls below a level supporting plant growth, and upstream in estuaries to the head of tidal influence. It includes bluffs, beaches, mudflats, kelp and eelgrass beds, salt marshes, gravel spits and estuaries.

Who is involved in the project?

The Puget Sound Nearshore Restoration Project is a cooperative effort among U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and local sponsors that include state and other federal government organizations, tribes, industries and environmental organizations. The local sponsors are represented by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.

What is the purpose of this project?

The purpose of the Puget Sound Nearshore Project is to identify significant ecosystem problems in Washington State's Puget Sound Basin, evaluate potential solutions, and restore and preserve critical nearshore habitat. The project is a cooperative effort among government organizations, tribes, industries, and environmental organizations to preserve and restore the health of the Sound's nearshore.

How significant is this project?

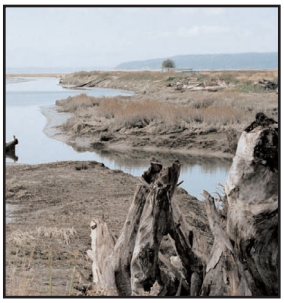
The project is one of the largest habitat restoration and preservation endeavors ever undertaken in the United States. Similar projects are underway in the Florida Everglades and Chesapeake Bay.

The federal government has approved funding for the first phase of the project that is underway by the Corps and U.S. Geological Survey. The first phase includes investigations of current information and developing plans to do the actual restoration and preservation work.

The second phase would be a commitment of billions of dollars to restore and preserve Puget Sound. Eventually, the Puget Sound Nearshore Project could be as significant as the nearly $8 billion authorized for restoring the Everglades in Florida and $5 billion for restoring Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

What's the problem with Puget Sound and why is this project needed?

The integrity of the nearshore ecosystem is in jeopardy. That jeopardy can result in further contaminated shellfish and reduced habitat, not only for the aquatic environment, but also for people whose livelihoods depend on shellfish and fish.



Nine of the 10 species listed as endangered or threatened within the Puget Sound region inhabit the nearshore. Pollution in parts of Puget Sound has caused lesions and tumors in flatfish that eagles, seals, birds and porpoises eat.

Urban and suburban developments along the Puget Sound shoreline have taken away critical shoreline, estuarine and nearshore habitats. Changes in the physical processes include limiting food and nutrient sources for marine life, deteriorating beach sediment movement, and altering the flows of surface and groundwater.

Who needs the Puget Sound Nearshore?

In addition to the aquatic life that makes its home in Puget Sound, the millions of citizens living and working in the Puget Sound region are also attached to the nearshore. For centuries, people have been drawn to the nearshore for economic and recreational purposes. Today, within the Northwest our lifestyles and economy rely on the Puget Sound Nearshore. Shellfish and salmon industries, ports and refineries and recreational activities all depend on the tidelands and shoreline.

What can be done to restore the Puget Sound Nearshore?

Early restoration efforts have been encouraging, yet these efforts have been small compared to the widespread on-going environmental deterioration. A broad systematic approach to reverse and prevent the harm is needed. The next step is to understand conditions within the nearshore and what's causing the environmental problems.

The Corps and U.S. Geological Survey, with assistance from state and local government organizations, tribes, industries and environmental organizations, are conducting scientific studies to develop solutions for the Puget Sound Nearshore.

What's happening now?

The project is currently in its feasibility study phase. The purpose of the feasibility study is to evaluate the factors that are causing the habitat to decline and pollution to occur in the Puget Sound Basin; to formulate, evaluate, and screen potential solutions to these problems; and to recommend a series of actions and projects. The study will look for projects that have both a federal interest and support from local communities that are willing to provide the necessary investment to address the habitat or pollution problems in their area of the Sound.

In the spring of 2003, the Nearshore Science Team plans to complete several important steps in the long-term project: creation of a Puget Sound Ecosystem Conceptual Model, Performance Measures, Guiding Ecological Principles and Project Criteria. Between now and then, the project's steering committee will work with local governments, tribes, environmental groups, Salmon Recovery Lead Entities and Marine Resources Committees to develop a process to identify and set priorities for individual restoration and preservation projects.

What is the timeline of this project?

The project began in 1999, with a reconnaissance study of the nearshore. The study identified a direct link between healthy nearshore habitat and the physical condition of the shoreline. The study identified several areas that would be central in restoring nearshore processes to a more natural state.

The reconnaissance study team recommended further investigation -- a feasibility study -- that has been underway since 2001. The Corps and local project managers anticipate the feasibility study will be completed by 2005 and followed by preliminary engineering and design to be completed by 2008.

The Nearshore Science Team projects that restoration and preservation construction will begin in 2008. During the next six years some early-action restoration and preservation work will also be done.

The timeline on the completion of the project is dependent on the scientific studies currently being conducted and conclusions in engineering design.

How much and who's paying for the project?

The Corps and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife have entered into a 50/50 cost share agreement for the feasibility study. The feasibility study will cost $12 million. Most of the local costs are being shared by a coalition of tribes, state and local government organizations, environmental groups and industries.

Project Managers:

Bernie Hargrave,
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
(206) 764-6839
Bernard.L.Hargrave.Jr@nws02.usace.army.mil

Tim Smith,
Washington State Department
of Fish and Wildlife
(360) 902-2223
smithtrs@dfw.wa.gov